



Mexico 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Nuevo Laredo

Assault; Bribery; Carjacking; Drug Trafficking; Extortion; Human Trafficking; Kidnapping; Murder; Narco-Terrorism; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Floods; Stolen items; Narco-Terrorism; Threats; Transportation Security; Travel Health and Safety

Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Mexico City; Western Hemisphere > Mexico > Nuevo Laredo

8/14/2012

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Since 2006, the Mexican government has engaged in an extensive effort to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). Mexican TCOs have been engaged in a vicious struggle with each other for control of lucrative drug trafficking routes. In order to prevent and combat violence, the government of Mexico has deployed military troops and federal police throughout the country. According to published reports, 47,500 people have been killed in narcotics-related violence since 2006. The vast majority of those killed have been members of TCOs and, to a lesser extent, the federal forces that are fighting them. However, innocent bystanders have been killed in shootouts between TCOs and Mexican law enforcement or between rival TCOs.

In early 2010, the Gulf TCO split from their enforcement arm, the Zetas TCO. Since that time, the entire region has been engulfed in violence. Recent violent attacks and persistent security concerns have prompted the U.S. Embassy to urge U.S. citizens to defer unnecessary travel to many parts of Mexico, including Tamaulipas and Coahuila. The Department has advised U.S. citizens residing or traveling in those areas to exercise extreme caution. USG personnel are prohibited from traveling overland into the interior of Mexico from the Texas border except in those instances that have been deemed mission essential.

Crime Threats

The security situation along the Texas border has changed markedly from a few years ago. The war between the Gulf and Zetas TCOs has led to a dramatic increase in violence in Tamaulipas and in the northern border regions of Coahuila. In the last year, large-scale firefights have taken place in towns and cities throughout the consular district, including Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, and Ciudad Acuna. These gun battles have occurred in broad daylight on streets and at other public venues. During some of these incidents, U.S. citizens



have been trapped and temporarily prevented from leaving the area. The situation in northeast Mexico remains fluid; the location and timing of armed engagements cannot be predicted.

Should travel to this region be necessary, visitors are urged to remain alert and exercise extreme caution during their stay. Visitors should be aware of their surroundings at all times, even when in areas generally considered safe. U.S. citizens should be cautious in general when using ATMs in Mexico. It is recommended that visitors traveling into Nuevo Laredo on day trips use ATMs in Laredo, TX prior to crossing over into Mexico. Cloning/counterfeiting of ATM cards and credit cards occurs in Mexico, and travelers are advised to check their account activity online at least weekly to detect fraudulent charges early. Visitors are also advised to avoid using bank machines in dark or isolated areas.

U.S. citizens are urged to be especially aware of safety and security concerns when visiting the border region and to exercise common-sense precautions such as visiting only legitimate business and tourist areas during daylight hours. Many of the crimes of violence involving American citizens have occurred at night in areas popular with narco-traffickers, such as the Zona de Tolerancia (aka 'Boys Town', the local red light district) and the casinos, Juego Juego and Amazonas. In addition, rival cartel members have targeted these locations for grenade attacks. All adult entertainment centers in the consular district are currently off limits to USG personnel.

Road Safety

Road safety is an area of particular concern. Travelers on the highways between Monterrey and the United States have been targeted for robbery that has resulted in violence and have also been caught in incidents of gunfire between criminals and Mexican law enforcement. Travelers should defer unnecessary travel on Mexican Highway 2 between Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo and from the Columbia International Bridge crossing west toward Piedras Negras due to the ongoing violent competition between TCOs. Travel outside of Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuna is likewise discouraged. Criminals have followed and harassed U.S. citizens traveling in their vehicles in these border areas. In June 2010, a Canadian citizen was killed and a U.S. citizen was critically injured after being attacked by cartel gunmen just south of Piedras Negras. There have been numerous carjackings in all three cities, particularly immediately following major gun battles. Criminals appear especially to target SUVs and full-size pick-up trucks for theft and carjacking along these routes.

Continued concerns regarding road safety along the Mexican border have prompted the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico to impose certain restrictions on U.S. government



employees transiting the area. Since July 2010, embassy and consulate employees and their families have not been permitted to travel by vehicle across the U.S.-Mexico border to or from any post in the interior of Mexico.

All highway travelers should avoid travel at night at all costs. Use toll roads when possible, plan routes ahead of time, and notify family and friends of your itinerary. Travelers are advised to keep a cell phone on their person at all times and to know how to reach friends and family in an emergency. Travelers should ensure they use road-worthy vehicles and maintain a full-size spare tire in case of a flat. The highways are well maintained between major cities and towns within the region, but their isolation leaves travelers vulnerable to crime.

In the cities, taxis are generally considered clean and safe. However, USG personnel are prohibited from hailing taxis off the street ('libre' taxis). Instead, they are required to either call in advance or use an existing cab stand. It is recommended that travelers negotiate the price before boarding since meters are not used. City buses are best avoided due to their crowded nature and lack of safety equipment.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

The primary security threat in the region stems from the drug cartels and the ongoing turf war between the Gulf and Zetas TCOs. The local, state, and federal governments exhibit a high degree of organization similar to their U.S. counterparts. Social services are administered to the populace, and protests that have occurred have been small and peaceful. Corruption stemming from narco-trafficking remains an issue that has affected service levels delivered by the state and local governments.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

There are no significant regional terrorism threats. However, the presence of the cartels and the movement of large sums of money has had a decaying influence on civil institutions at all levels with corruption of police and security officials being the most serious concern. The local police force in Nuevo Laredo was disbanded in July 2011 due to widespread corruption issues. In the interim, federal forces are patrolling the city's streets, and a new state police force has begun carrying out the duties of the local police.

International and Transnational Terrorism



There is no evidence of any transnational terrorists residing or transiting through this region. However, the nature of the border and the ready access to both human smugglers and fake documents continue to make this area a potential jumping off point for international terrorists.

Civil Unrest

True civil unrest in the region is uncommon. Most protests are local in nature and do not pose a threat to U.S. citizens. Even when protesting U.S. policies, there appears to be a careful differentiation between U.S. policies and the American people at large. That being said, there is always the potential that a protest may turn violent. Visitors are advised to avoid protest areas and to resist making remarks that could lead to a confrontation.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

The region does not suffer from ongoing environmental threats. However, heavy rains can often lead to localized flooding. Heavy rains also frequently lead to widespread power outages, but these are normally remedied within hours. Officials sometimes remove manhole covers in order to speed the evacuation of standing water. These areas often are not marked adequately and can lead to road hazards. Travelers moving during storms are advised to watch for poles with plastic garbage bags tied to them as these are often the only warnings to motorists that a manhole cover has been removed.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

These sorts of accidents are fairly rare owing to the isolation of the manufacturing areas from the city proper and the routing of hazmat materials to the more distant bridge crossing points. The city maintains civil emergency personnel, but their training and equipment is sub-standard in comparison to most major U.S. cities. There are some ad-hoc mutually supporting agreements between Nuevo Laredo and Laredo emergency response elements, but these agreements have not been tested in a real-life scenario.

Kidnappings

Kidnapping for ransom is an established criminal activity throughout Mexico. Most incidents go unreported. Unofficial estimates of kidnapping levels vary widely, from 600 to 3,000 per year countrywide. The usual practice is to not notify police authorities, as the popular belief is that the police may be involved in the crime or are unable to resolve the situation. Kidnapping



has not been a major issue in this consular district. Many of the kidnappings that have occurred have shown a connection to drug trafficking. That said, as the government continues to target TCOs and their operations, the potential to exploit other revenue streams, such as kidnapping, could increase.

A more common type of kidnapping is "express kidnapping" and is based on the industry-wide 24-hour withdrawal limit placed on ATM cards. The term "express kidnapping" is also still applied to the kidnapping of random victims held for brief periods where only small ransom amounts are demanded. A typical scenario may last for several hours and be settled for the peso-equivalent of a few thousand dollars.

Over the past few years, it has become increasingly common for extortionists to call prospective victims on the telephone, posing as kidnappers, and demand payments in return for the release of an abducted family member - usually a child. Persons receiving such calls should be skeptical, as these calls are often hoax kidnappings designed to occur when the "victim" is otherwise unreachable, leading the family to believe falsely that a kidnapping has occurred. Most of these types of threats are baseless. Persons receiving such calls should contact the local police immediately.

Drug and Narcoterrorism

The security threat posed by TCO-related violence remains the most significant one in this area. Firefights between Mexican federal forces and TCOs have occurred on a regular basis over the past two years. In April 2010, a grenade was thrown into the Nuevo Laredo Consulate compound causing some physical damage but no casualties. Consulate General Nuevo Laredo and Consular Agency Piedras Negras, Coahuila, were temporarily closed as a result.

Gunbattles may occur at any time of the day or night as rival TCO gunmen engage in hit-and-run attacks and as military and federal police encounter these TCO gunmen while on patrol. In an effort to prevent the military from responding to criminal activity, TCOs have set up roadblocks or "narco-blockades" in various parts of Nuevo Laredo in which armed gunmen carjack unsuspecting drivers and use their vehicles to block off roads. Since the war began, the government of Mexico has increased the number of troops and federal police in this region significantly. Soldiers and federal police frequently conduct patrols throughout the city. The Consulate advises U.S. citizens to give these convoys a wide berth as the TCOs have been known to engage them without regard to civilian casualties. Travelers are advised to remain cautious and to identify potential "safe havens" if violence breaks out in their area.



Police Response

Reports of police corruption and police involvement in criminal activity continue to be a problem in Mexico. Consequently, citizens are often indifferent to police authority, adding to the sense of lawlessness in the region. The general perception is that the majority of crime victims do not report crimes due to fear of reprisals by the police, the belief that police are corrupt, or the feeling that nothing would come from it. Local and state police generally are underpaid and poorly trained in comparison to their U.S. counterparts. Reporting crime can be an archaic, exhausting process in Mexico and is perceived widely to be a waste of time, except for the most serious of crimes or when a police report is required for insurance purposes.

In July 2011, the entire Municipal Police force in Nuevo Laredo was dismissed among allegations of large-scale corruption. To date, a local police force has not been reconstituted. The government of Mexico is in the process of vetting and training new officers. However, the duties of the local police have been assumed by a newly created state police force. This group is supported by both the army and the federal police in the city. All three groups conduct regular patrols throughout the city.

Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime, and Local Police Telephone Numbers

Travelers should contact the American Citizen Services Office at the U.S. Consulate Nuevo Laredo for assistance in dealing with the State Police or military (the numbers are listed below). U.S. citizens are advised to cooperate with the police and military if stopped or questioned. If involved in a traffic accident or victimized by crime, you may be required to accompany the investigating officer to the local police station or state prosecutor's office to file a complaint or respond to questions. Should a police report be required for an insurance claim, a nominal fee will be charged. The Mexican Police emergency telephone number is 066.

How to Handle Incidents of Government Detention or Harassment

American citizens in need of assistance due to crime or medical emergencies may call the U.S. Consulate Nuevo Laredo and ask to speak to the American Citizen Services Office. American citizens who are detained or harassed by government forces may also seek assistance at the Consulate. A Consular Duty Agent is available 24-hours a day by phone. It is particularly important to identify which agency was involved. A description of the vehicles



and uniforms would be helpful. Being able to describe accurately what occurred, the time, date, location, and which agency was involved will greatly enhance the Consulate's ability to reach a satisfactory result from the complaint.

Medical Emergencies

Nuevo Laredo has several hospitals and an emergency response system of ambulance and fire department emergency medical technicians. That said, the health system is not directly comparable to U.S. health care standards. Health insurance is an important consideration. Travelers are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate health coverage while in Mexico.

In a medical emergency in Nuevo Laredo, contact either of the following hospitals:

Clinica de Especialidades
Obregon 3256
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas
Telephone: 867-714-0805

Hospital San Jose
Guerrero 3005
Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas
Telephone: 867-714-9160 / 867-711-2907

Air Ambulance Services
AEA International
800-468-5232

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

This region remains a critical threat environment. If travel cannot be deferred, travelers should exercise extreme caution. Travelers should carry a working cell phone at all times and should know where to go in case of an emergency.

Areas to Avoid and Best Security Practices

Travelers should stick to well known, well populated routes and should avoid traveling at night. Travelers are advised to avoid known high crime areas such as the Zona de Tolerancia



(red light district) and those bars and clubs favored by narco-traffickers. Travelers should trust their instincts and be prepared to depart any establishment where you feel at risk.

Personal Security Practices

Travelers should leave valuables and irreplaceable items at home. All visitors are encouraged to make use of hotel safes when available, avoid wearing obviously expensive jewelry or designer clothing, and carry only cash or credit cards that will be needed for each outing.

Avoid wearing jewelry. Carry a clutch purse or a neck purse instead of a shoulder bag. Carry a wallet in the front trouser pocket or front jacket pocket. Never leave shopping bags or merchandise unattended. Maintain a low profile: do not advertise that you are American. Dress casually, keep valuables out of sight, and do not draw attention to yourself with your actions.

When hiring domestic help, vet them to the greatest extent that you can. Ensure that they are trained to not volunteer information to strangers and to not allow access of workers without prior authorization.

Vary your routine: be unpredictable in your movements; vary your routes from home to the office as well as your departure and arrival times. Be alert to possible surveillance: note any individual who appears out of place along your routes to scheduled activities, such as going from home to office. Avoid sitting outside at restaurants. Instead, try to find a seat in an area not clearly visible from the street.

Be alert to your surroundings: minimize valuables and do not carry large sums of money while in crowded, urban areas. Be aware of popular scams and robbery tactics used to distract your attention.

Protecting Your Vehicle

Theft of the vehicle's car sound systems is a common crime. The installation of a car alarm is recommended strongly. Also, keep your vehicle sterile, storing anything that would entice a thief out of plain view or in the trunk.

Avoid parking your vehicle on the street. Park inside a residential compound, in a parking lot with an attendant, or at least within view of the location of your visit. When parking in a lot of a shopping facility, be sure to park as close as possible to the store entrance and away from dumpsters, bushes, or large vehicles. Be sure to lock your doors, close windows, and hide



shopping bags and gifts in the trunk, out of sight. The installation of a car alarm is a necessary precaution in deterring vehicle thefts and thefts of interior contents.

Further Information

U.S. Consulate in Nuevo Laredo

Allende #3330, Colonia Jardin

Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas

Telephone: 867-714-0512

After hours, U.S. citizens needing emergency assistance from the Consulate may call the duty officer at 867-727-2797.

OSAC Country Council

The Regional Security Office has established a local OSAC Country Council for the Nuevo Laredo region. Any U.S. companies interested in joining should send their contact details to the Nuevo Laredo RSO Inbox. For more information, visit the Country Council online.